

STATEMENT C14 – Charlotte Cameron-Beaumont

**Statement for St. Catherine’s Place Planning Proposal**

**Dr.Charlotte Cameron-Beaumont**

**Point One: Lack of Sunlight to Children’s Play Area (the landscaped courtyard)**

**Many of the problems with this application could be solved by rearranging the geographical layout of the tall buildings. In this written statement I have described what I see as the problems and then described my potential solution.**

- The presence of a landscaped courtyard in this most recent application is a welcome response to the fact that the previous application was partially turned down on lack of resident children’s play areas.
- However I question that this will be a functional space, simply due to the lack of sunlight it will receive: it is surrounded by exceedingly high buildings to the East, South, and West. Buildings of 14 storeys and 11 storeys are sited to the South; a building of 8 storeys is sited to the West; whilst the current Catherine’s House of 8 storeys is sited to the East. There is also a building to the North, currently two or three storeys high, but this is one of the plots with an application for outline planning for residential so this may increase.
- The planning department have negotiated a small gap, where the building will be only 4 storeys high, but this gap is thin. It will let the sun in for only very short periods of time. And let us remember that four storeys isn’t that low. So I don’t count it to be a very functional gap.
- For children living in flats, it is crucially important that they get time out in the sunshine, for mental health and vitamin D, which is absorbed by our skin from sunlight. And also for the health of their parents, who need to be healthy to bring their children up well. Coronavirus has shown us that lack of vitamin D increases the chance of having problematic respiratory infections.
- Other children’s play places in this area include Bedminster Green itself, and Windmill Hill City Farm , but these are both similarly set to be overshadowed by future BG developments. Bedminster Green itself is set to be overshadowed by the prospective development on the Hereford Street car park to the West, Dandara to the North, and Deeley Freed to the East. It is already overshadowed somewhat to the South by Windmill Hill itself. Windmill Hill City Farm is set to be overshadowed in the afternoons by the Deeley Freed development.
- QED: there will not be any areas of sunshine in the afternoon in which children can play , and very few areas in the morning (only the farm) - amongst this entire Bedminster Green development - a vast area of new homes.
- It is true that families can walk up the hill to Victoria Park. A great option, no doubt, but it is involves an outing, crossing main roads; and so, although it will not doubt be a popular place to visit, it does not provide appropriate ‘doorstep play’ types of areas for children, as referred to by the planning inspector in his recent report on the St. Catherine’s previous application.
- The planning inspector at the recent appeal stated that: “the Council’s Child Yield Calculator indicates that at least 27 children would be likely to form part of the future residential population of this development”

**My solution:**

I think the geographical layout could be much better designed. My ideas are as follows:

- Why not put the taller element in the position of Plot 4; that way it would only overshadow the road and the already high 9 storey student buildings planned for Dalby Avenue on the other side of this wide road. Better this than overshadowing a children's play courtyard and East Street. I'm not sure if the developer owns the Iceland building but this would be an ideal position for a tall building because it stands to the East. It would not overshadow East Street either.
- Plot 3, situated to the west and south, could then become lower rise. You could have 4-6 storeys with gaps of 3 storeys. Thus letting the sun into the courtyard a lot more.
- This would also benefit East Street (which, under the current application plans will I think will be shaded quite substantially (I have calculated using a 3-D sketchup model that it would shade East Street during the morning, and in combination with the Dandara development would have quite a negative effect: really I think that a professional job on this should be requested as part of the planning application)
- If the developer wanted to maximise space for residential he could also create a pedestrianised tunnel with residential buildings above it, at the St. Catherine's Place entrance on Dalby Avenue, instead of the one he has created at the end of Mill Lane. (For the record I don't like the idea of a tunnel myself as I don't think it's sensible for the safety of pedestrians but I'm just offering this in case it is considered by councillors and planning officers as a better solution for all). He could also potentially add more storeys to the current Catherine's House building, leaving everything to the west of that building to be low-rise. This would mean that the courtyard would get some sun in from both the South and the West.
- The pocket park and the wide pedestrianised statement entrance on Dalby Lane could then be moved to the Mill Lane entrance instead . This would make much more sense because it is immediately opposite Bedminster Green itself and therefore would make more of statement for pedestrians and cyclists. You could have a pedestrianised crossing leading from Bedminster Green across to the Mill Lane entrance whether would be a pocket park.
- You could get rid of the tunnel at the end of Mill Lane.
- This solution would work so much better for the Stafford Street houses. It would also work much better for the Catherine's House flats because the tall building would lie to the East rather than the West.
- It would work much better for the children's courtyard.
- It would work much better for E Street, letting more sun into E Street
- it would work much better for Bedminster Green, with the a pocket park at the end of Mill Lane.

**Point Two: Concerns about the tunnel under plot 3 which will form the entrance to the new Mill Lane**

- personally I don't think a tunnel for a pedestrian walkway is a good idea. I have concerns about safety.

**Point Three: comments in favour from Catherine's House**

I note there are some comments in favour of the development from Catherine's House. However half of these were flats based on the East side of the development. These are people whose daylight and sunlight will not be affected to such an extent.

#### **Point Four: East Street**

A key argument from Firmstone is that this development is necessary to regenerate East Street.

I live locally, and have done for 20 years, and I shop on East Street regularly, and I would say: Yes, we do want urban regeneration and new homes, but this does not have to come with a price tag of over-massed developments, no affordable home component, and no consideration to sustainability or children's health.

I would argue that we want the right development, not just any development: We want a development which will bring well-being to the residents, the community and the economy of the area.

In past Planning Committee meetings, much was made of the need to move fast with BG developments, with the supposition that East Street would die otherwise. My opinion is somewhat different:

- East Street is definitely not gentrified, but it is full of life: In January 2021 we did a count of shops and found a total of 86 units, of which 72 are open and only 14 closed. It includes 7 cafes, a greengrocers, a new independent small-style supermarket which opened last month, 2 butchers, a post office, 2 banks, a chemist, clothes shops, charity shops, 6 barbers and hairdressers, 5 takeaways, a fish stall, a pet shop, key cutting, fish and chips, 2 pubs, 4 phone shops, 3 newagents,1 travel agent,....and much much more. Unfortunately, the normal hustle and bustle is currently on hold due to covid.
- To give you an idea of the catchment population before covid, in January 2020, before lockdown and just before the second planning committee meeting. I counted the numbers of people going past. 501 people went past in 15 minutes, an average of 33 per minute.

If traders are keen to increase their catchment population due to worried about going bankrupt over Covid, I would argue that they would be better with a quickly built lower rise development than a tall building which takes much longer to build.

I would describe East Street as a high street in flux, rather than one in decline. The population around E Street has changed in demographics quite dramatically over the last few years to become much more middle-class, and many of the shops on East Street do not yet reflect that. If some of them are finding that their trade has diminished then I think that this could be one of the reasons. Many of the people living locally choose instead to go either to Wapping Wharf or North Street.

Any development which is substandard in design, massing, height and public realm could see this trend continue, with local people still not choosing to shop on East Street.

This planning proposal would in fact shade the shopping precinct at St. Catherine's, and it would also shade East Street and Bedminster Parade, for most of the morning, in all seasons except summer, as it lies to the South of all three of these shopping areas. What better way to ensure the death of a high street than to put it in the shade? The ideas behind the East Street Vision Project were to create café seating areas – a great idea, but no-one will hang out there if there is no sunshine.

If we build something too monstrous, windy or shady, with no feeling of joy, even the people who do end up living here won't stay around to shop or sit in cafes. They'll go to Wapping Wharf or North Street instead, as many of the present local people do.

If we want a vibrant successful East Street then we need to build fabulous, light, sustainable buildings; buildings which encourage a state of well-being for the inhabitants and the community; and make people want to live here, shop here, and hang out in the vicinity. I don't believe that this development will do this.

Furthermore, we need buildings that enable people to feel a sense of space when they are in the shopping area and which do not block out the sun from our shopping areas. The dense massing and the height of this building unfortunately means that this is not the case for this development.

*Great architecture of a human scale will grow the local economy; but dense massing and monstrous heights will diminish it.*

*So, please, let's hold out for a development that will make Bedminster proud.*

Appendix:

**Data on East Street shops, collected on Saturday, 23 January 2021: 86 shops in total on East Street, of which only 14 are empty.**

*East Street Shops as of 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2021:*

2 x Estate Agents	7 x Cafes	5 x Pawnbrokers
6 x Barber	1 x Wilko	1 x Key Cutters
1 x off license	1 x Schoolwear shop	2 x Pubs
1 x post office	4 x Nail bar/beauty salon	2 x Clothes Shops
1 x restaurant	2 x Butchers	1 x Opticians
5 x charity shops	4 x Amusement arcades	3 x Newsagents
2 x betting shops	4 x Phone Shop	1 x Card Shop
1 x Vintage Shop	2 x Fruit and	1 x Travel Agent
1 x Poundland	Veg/Supermarkets	2 x Vaping Shops
1 x Chemists	2 x Banks	5 x Takeaways
	1 x Pet Shop	14 x empty shops

*Note :* St. Catherine's shopping precinct is off East Street, and therefore not included in our count, but the appellant states that, out of a total of 11 premises, only two are paying rent or service charges. Indeed, it is true that many of the 11 shops in St Catherine's precinct are empty, but the number of empty shops has increased since Mr Firmstone owned the site, (according to the staff of the YMCA second-hand furniture shop this was because Firmstone was not renewing leases. The YMCA did not want to leave, but were forced to, in 2019, and they indicated to me at that time that other shops were in the same situation).

**Point 6: Equalities Information**

The Equalities Impact Statement states that " this application would not have any significant adverse impact upon different groups, or implications for the Equalities Act 2010".

I have two points to raise on this:

- 1. Numerous heavy fire doors negatively impact on the elderly, disabled people, pregnant women, and people with young children and buggies**

My elderly mother lives in a block of flats. She has to go through SEVEN fire doors to get out of the building! I recently spent a couple of months staying with her. The fire doors are heavy enough for me, a healthy 49-year-old. When I have shopping to carry in I find it very hard to open the doors and it can negatively impact on my back. I cannot imagine what this must be like for the elderly, disabled, or for young mothers. It makes it so hard to get out of the building. This is particularly bad for young parents who need to be able to easily take their children outdoors without struggling through seven fire doors with a buggy and two young children. This may seem like a minor point, but I consider it to be a very serious issue. Not being able to easily get out of the house can cause isolation and mental health problems -and these things negatively affect elderly, disabled, and young parents more so than others anyway. Moreover, the many fire doors mean that you are much less likely to bump into a neighbour, so they negatively effect on community as well. It is easy enough to put in the more expensive type of fire door which is held open all the time by a catch which let's go when the fire alarm goes off. This would make a huge difference to isolation. I think this should be included as an essential upgrade to all blocks of flats.

**2. Might lack of sunlight on courtyard adversely affect BAME children more than others due to differing Vitamin D requirements?**

The Equalities Act 2010 may possibly be relevant when considering the lack of sunlight reaching the inner courtyard (which is intended, in particular, to provide for 'doorstep' play amongst the resident children).

I consider this a failing on all the children who will live in this development, and have written about this issue in more detail earlier in my main statement.

Nevertheless, could I ask if the provision of sunlight could be considered to be more important for BAME children than others, due to different requirements for vitamin D? Vitamin D absorption from the sun is known to be lower amongst BAME groups and thus diseases such as rickets, caused by lack of Vitamin D, are found in higher proportions amongst BAME groups. If this is so then it might be something that needs considering under the Equalities Act.

Whilst Vitamin D can be given as a supplement, the following article from the Pharmaceutical Journal says that there is doubt about the efficacy of Vitamin D supplementation.

<https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/feature/a-cloud-of-doubt-over-the-sunshine-vitamin>

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